



CHOOSING THE RIGHT SCHOOL: Why Rankings Don't Help

The Association of Independent Maryland & DC Schools strongly disagrees with attempts by the media to rank schools. Such efforts, often brief summaries intended to give readers quick information and to make choices seem easy, do not accurately inform the public, nor do they serve the best interests of families who hope to make wise educational choices for their children. AIMS urges member schools to decline to participate in these efforts.

AIMS believes that rankings confuse school-selection issues and make it more difficult for parents to make informed choices. Parents themselves know instinctively that choosing the right school for their child cannot be reduced to a few neatly-packaged categories. How does one quantify the educational experiences of a child with an outstanding teacher? Or the values that a child learns in a school community? Or the confidence a child gains as she progresses through a program that maintains high standards while giving her the support she needs to succeed?

Parents also know that no two children are alike and that what works in the classroom for one may not always work for another. Independent schools are designed around that very principle – to understand the individual needs of each child. This commitment to know and serve every student is at the heart of independent schools' success – it's why each school has a distinctive educational mission and creative teachers who are freed from standardized approaches to classroom instruction. And that's why comparisons based upon limited information are so misleading – they ignore the depth and richness of a child's experience at a school that meets his individual

needs and helps him to mature both academically and emotionally.

The good news is that independent schools provide parents with a wide range of choices based upon the needs of their children. The challenge is that, in choosing among so many outstanding options, there is simply no shortcut: Choosing the right independent, parochial, or public school requires parents to do their homework, which includes a campus visit, a careful reading of school information, and conversations with students, teachers, and administrators. While data are important, they are useful only in the context of a thorough search.

Given the high stakes for children to receive a world-class education, it is more important today than ever before that families find the right educational match for each child's individual needs. School rankings do not help parents to make that choice; in fact, they hinder the effort. That is why AIMS schools should not participate in rankings – years of experience shows that what works for children cannot be neatly packaged or summarized.